

Message Text

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PAGE 01 JOHANN 00022 060857Z

ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 CU-02 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

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FM AMCONSUL JOHANNESBURG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5466

INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMCONSUL DURBAN

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, PINT, SF

SUBJECT: SOWETO SCHOOLS OPEN TO SMALL NUMBERS OF STUDENTS

REF: JOHANNESBURG 0001

1. IN AN ATTEMPT TO GIVE BLACK STUDENTS A SECOND CHANCE TO PREPARE FOR MATRIC EXAMS (IN MARCH), SOWETO SCHOOLS REOPENED JANUARY 5 FOR SPECIALSESSION. ATTENDANCE APPEARED INITIALLY SMALL AS MOST PARENTS AND STUDENTS WERE CAUTIOUSLY CHECKING CLIMATE BEFORE ACCEPTING POLICE ASSURANCES THAT THERE WILL BE NO INCIDENTS OR RAIDS.

2. MOST URBAN BLACKS APPEAR EAGER TO GET CHILDREN BACK INTO SCHOOL, RANGING FROM EDITORIALS IN ALL LEADING NEWSPAPERS (IN PARTICULAR PERCY QOBOZA'S WORLD) TO APPARENT SSRG CALL FOR END TO SCHOOL BOYCOTT. KEY DETERMINANT, HOWEVER, IS PARENTAL CONCERN ABOUT SAFETY OF THEIR CHILDREN. IF SOWETO POLICE COMMANDER VISSER STANDS BY HIS PROMISE TO RESPECT SANCTITY OF SCHOOL GROUNDS, "EXCEPT IF A CRIME IS COMMITTED LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 JOHANN 00022 060857Z

ON THE PREMISES WHICH POLICE MUST INVESTIGATE", THEN EXPECTATIONS ARE THAT ATTENDANCE SHOULD ACHIEVE NEAR NORMAL LEVELS BY THE END OF THIS MONTH.

3. SCHOOL BOYCOTT HAS BEEN ONE OF MOST SUCCESSFUL OF BLACK PROTESTS AND OF CONCERN TO ALL COMMUNITIES. THEREFORE, APPARENT SWING OF SENTIMENT IN TOWNSHIPS AGAINST

CONTINUED BOYCOTT COMES AS SOME SURPRISE (AND RELIEF). SEVERAL EXPLANATIONS FOR APPARENT TURN ABOUT IN STUDENT WILLINGNESS TO RESUME CLASSES HAVE BEEN ADVANCED IN TALKS WITH BLACK EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS. FIRST IS THAT COMBINATION OF PARENTAL CONCERN OVER EDUCATION OF CHILDREN COMPOUNDED BY APPEALS OF INFLUENTIAL BLACKS SUCH AS QOBOZA, KAMBULE, AND MATHABATHE HAS CONVINCED STUDENTS IT IS TIME TO GO BACK TO SCHOOL IN THIS REGARD, RECENT SAG PROPOSALS (SEE REFTTEL) FOR AT LEAST PARTLY MEETING STUDENT DEMANDS ON EDUCATION ARE TAKEN AS A SIGN THAT THE SAG IS BEING SOMEWHAT MORE RESPONSIVE TO BLACK GRIEVANCES.

4. ANOTHER THEORY IS THAT SSRC IS BECOMING INCRASINGLY SPLINTEED AND IT IS DIFFICULT TO ASSESS WHAT THE STUDENT LEADERSHIP REALLY STANDS FOR. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE SUPPOSTED SSRC CALL FOR A RETURN TO CLASSES HAS BEEN ISSUED BY ONE FACTION OF THE SSRC (WHOSE MONOLITHIC NATURE IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY SUSPECT) WHILE OTHER FACTIONS MAY NOT SUPPORT IT.

5. ANOTHER, PERHAPS OVERLY MACHIAVELLIAN THEORY BUT ONE WITH SURPRISING SUPPORT, IS THAT SSRC WANTS STUDENTS BACK IN SCHOOL IN ORDER TO PROVOKE NEW SERIES OF CLASHES WITH SA POLICE. ADVOCATES OF THIS THEORY SAY SUPPORTERS OF STRATEGY OBVIOUSLY FEEL THE POLICE WILL NOT STAY OUT OF THE SCHOOLS DESPITE VISSER'S ASSURANCES AND A NEW SERIES OF INCIDENTS WILL EVOLVE BETWEEN STUDENTS AND POLICE THAT WILL STRENGTHEN STUDENT MILITANCY AND COMMUNITY OPPOSITION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 JOHANN 00022 060857Z

WHICH SEEM TO HAVE WEAKENED IN PERIOD OF RELATIVE CALM LASTING OVER PAST MONTH.

6. COMMENT: BOTH BLACK AND WHITE COMMUNITIES IN THE MAIN SEEM TO HAVE FINGERS CROSSED THAT STUDENT RETURN TO CLASSES WILL BE FIRST STEP TO RESTORING RACIAL PEACE. DESPITE SAG MOVES TO MEET SOME BLACK DEMANDS FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORMS, BLACK REMAIN SKEPTICAL OF ANY LASTING CALM WHILE FUNDAMENTAL INEQUITIES REMAIN. CONGEN BELIEVES POLICE LEADERSHIP WILL CERTAINLY MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO KEEP THE PEACE AND STAY OUT OF THE SCHOOLS DESPITE THE SKEPTICISM OF MANY. IT IS OUR FEELING BRIG VISSER WAS BROUGHT IN AS SOWETO COMMANDER EXPRESSLY FOR THE PURPOSE OF RESTORING THE PEACE AND HE REZALIZES THAT ANY GRATUITIOUS POLICE INCIDENTS IN THE NEXT FEW WEEKS WOULD CERTAINLY WRECK ANY HOPES FOR RESTORING ORDER FOR SOME TIME.
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